

Remote database administration

Choosing the best provider for your environment **Interviewed by Jason Lloyd**

In today's competitive business environment, the need for reliable, accessible, mission-critical data is paramount. Data helps organizations develop business plans, increase sales revenue, better serve customers, and measure performance.

Conversely, the consequences of data unavailability, data loss, data inaccuracy, and lack of data integrity are quite severe. In some cases, even temporary loss of data can cause an organization irreparable harm. For that reason, many companies are now considering remote database administration (remote DBA) service providers not only for supplemental database support but also for complete database administration outsourcing.

Smart Business spoke with Angie Gleim, business development manager for Perpetual Technologies, about how remote database administration can help businesses succeed.

What is remote DBA?

Remote database administration is a service provided by a third-party vendor, in which a client's database environment is monitored and managed from a remote location. Although there are variations in the depth of services provided by remote DBA vendors, many make use of monitoring tools or proprietary scripts to ensure data availability and database health. Service levels include supplemental vacation coverage, after-hours support, or complete database outsourcing.

What benefits can be offered by remote DBA service providers?

The major advantages of remote DBA support are cost savings and increased quality of support.

When an organization chooses remote DBA support, the remote database support company takes on the task of recruiting and maintaining DBA staff, funding employee benefits, office space, equipment, employee training, and other related costs of having an employee. Small to mid-size businesses may also experience a cost savings by not staffing a full-time DBA for



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part-time DBA work.

In addition to cost savings, a remote DBA service provider is ideally staffed with DBAs who possess depth and diverse database knowledge. This team of experts can provide around-the-clock support to ensure that the coverage is continuous and not subject to interruptions due to sickness, vacation, or resignation.

What are the key criteria to look for in a remote DBA service provider?

When choosing a remote DBA service provider, obvious items such as price and service offerings are well known and heavily reviewed but are not the only criteria to consider. Five additional areas that play a key role in insuring the correct service provider for your environment are technical experience, security, communication, financial status, and references.

A good remote database service provider can attract and retain excellent, certified DBAs. Service providers can pay a premium for DBA talent, because a good DBA can support multiple clients. Permanent employee DBAs can only support one client, the employer. However, assuming this to be the case can prove to be a huge mistake. Do not hesitate to ask for and

review résumés and qualifications of the remote DBA team. Schedule a technical interview to make certain you evaluate the credentials remote DBA team.

In addition to a qualified technical team, remote DBA service providers should be prepared to share and review their security policies with you as well as learn more about your security requirements. If a remote DBA company cannot guarantee secure connectivity and data protection, outsourcing remote DBA support should not be considered. Items to consider include secure connectivity, authentication, background checks and clearances, and site and physical security.

Another issue often overlooked when choosing a remote DBA service provider is communication. Learn as much as you can about the remote DBA's communication plan. How will the service provider's DBA team be notified of emergency after-hours issues? How often will status reports be delivered to your team? Will status reports be delivered on-site, via e-mail, Web meeting, or conference call? How can you schedule a project-based task with the remote DBA team? It is essential to select a provider who offers a forum to understand your needs as well as a plan to communicate its actions.

When choosing a remote DBA service provider, financial status should also be reviewed. Analyzing financial reports might help to forecast the company's ability to attract and retain qualified staff. The ability to guarantee continuity and reliability of service should be of key importance to your selection.

Reviewing a remote DBA service provider's client reference list and past performance is another important consideration. When asking for references, make sure you inquire about current clients whose needs are as similar to yours as possible. Set up a convenient allotted time to speak with these references, and have a structured question list prepared in advance.

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